



A conversation with Norman de Palm

On Tuesday, June 6, “Zulika” by Curacao filmmaker Norman de Palm will premier in Aruba through the efforts of the “Mi Cutisa” Foundation. One of the few feature films made in Papiamentu, the native language of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao. The film has received world wide acclaim after being screened at several children’s film festivals from Ecuador to Korea, and received a mention for excellence from the Chicago International Children’s Film Festival.

Norman De Palm has also produced and distributed other films that open a window onto island life, including “Desiree,” (1984) “Almacita Di Desolato,” (1986) and “Ava & Gabriel, Un Historia Di Amor” (1990), all receiving international critical acclaim. While in Aruba for the premier of “Zulaika,” he will conduct a lecture on Friday, June 02, about the trials and tribulations of filmmaking. While in Aruba previously to announce the local screening of his film he took some time to talk THE NEWS reporter Rosalie Klein. He described his time studying film at the New York University Tisch School of Arts in with Felix de Rooy, with whom he often collaborates, a young film student named Spike Lee and Ernest Dickerson, who partnered with Spike Lee, and how they all made the rounds of film festivals for independent filmmakers.

The News: How difficult is it to finance a movie he in the islands?

De Palm: “Zulika” was made at a cost of \$300,000, which is nothing for making a film in the states and would give creative filmmakers a chance to make more films at that budget. For the average commercial film in the states that wouldn’t even pay for the catering. So it is very relative, for here, that is a whole lot of money to get together to make a film, and that is the basic bottom line, what you need to make a 35mm film, \$300,000. Then everyone still has to love you and give you everything for free: tickets, hotels, food, whatever, locations.

The News: How long does it take you to get the funding together for a film?

De Palm: With the lowest budget film, which is would be for \$300,000, you could have it done in a year and a half, and have your film if you have your money.

The News: You are rather unique. There are not many feature filmmakers producing in the three islands are there?

De Palm: No, together with Felix de Rooi, who was my partner on my first three films, we are basically the only ones that come back and work on the island. There are of course other filmmakers working in Holland or somewhere else, but not on the islands. That is why when I am here there are a lot of people with scripts and good ideas that approach. That is how St. Martaan film happened. (The Panman, Rhythm of the Palms, in post production) A St. Martaan director asked me to help him, and I told him how he could do it, working with a young crew.

The News: Are all your films about the islands?

De Palm: “Papa’s Song” was shot partly in Curacao, the portion with the basic information and the rest was shot in Holland, because that is what the story required. It was shot as a flashback.

The News: Which is your favorite film that you have produced?

De Palm: I have to say two, “Desiree,” which is the first one we did as students at NYU, the film the Felix made to finish his curriculum, as that was also the start in film and theater. We did a big tour with the play, and the film at the same time. At one time one could go Friday to the play, Saturday to the film, and Sunday go and hear the musical score performed. In Holland it became a very big thing that one could do “a weekend of Desiree.” Also, it reminds me of the time we had nothing, and to make this film was quite an accomplishment. “Ava & Gabriel” is the other, partly because it has traveled so extensively, I still have booklets from all the different film festivals. It was my big award winner, the biggest movie we ever made, the biggest crew, budget and locations. I never made another film that large a scale. It was a huge amount of work for a producer, particularly the multi-cultural crew and handling them. I was amazed how many accolades and attention it got. That one time satisfied my need to make such a big budget film, I wouldn’t like to do one like that again, I prefer working small scale.

The News: Is there any experience in particular that inspired you to take up a career in film?

De Palm: While growing up in Curacao they had the classic films of the fifties on TeleCuracao. These were the days when it was black and white, there were few color films yet. These were movies like “To Kill a Mockingbird” with Gregory Peck, Susan Hayward films and Cary Grant films. Marilyn Monroe, “Film Noir” all of them, this is what we had on TV, we had no choice, and I devoured it. Often I have thought that

the black and white medium is very beautiful, I wonder why they don't make them anymore, they have a mystery about them.

Mr. De Palm's conversation with THE NEWS was extensive, touching on many aspects of filmmaking and handling celebrity status, which limited space does not allow us to cover here. Tomorrow evening's lecture takes place at the Teatro Geechi Pieters of Mascaruba on the Dominicanessenstraat in Oranjestad at 8:00 P.M. The subject is "How to write a script" and he will impart more of his vast experience and expertise in filmmaking for those that are considering working in the field. The entrance fee is 10 Aruban Florins per person, and he will be available for questions and discussion after.